

PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING OF MARGINALIZED COMMUNITIES AMID ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGE

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Abstract

Environmental change manifested through climate variability, deforestation, pollution, and natural disasters poses not only physical but also profound psychological threats, especially for marginalized communities. This paper explores the often-overlooked mental health dimensions of environmental degradation among socially and economically disadvantaged groups, including indigenous peoples, rural poor, Dalits, fisherfolk, and urban slum dwellers. These communities are frequently situated in ecologically vulnerable regions and face chronic exposure to environmental risks without adequate support systems. The resulting stressors such as displacement, loss of livelihood, cultural dislocation, and uncertainty have significant implications for psychological well-being. Using an interdisciplinary approach, this study draws on community-level interviews, mental health surveys, and environmental data to analyze how environmental change contributes to anxiety, depression, trauma, and a diminished sense of identity and agency among marginalized populations. For example, indigenous communities facing deforestation not only lose access to land and resources but also suffer identity fragmentation due to the disruption of their traditional ecological knowledge and spiritual connection to nature. Despite these challenges, the paper also identifies coping mechanisms rooted in collective resilience, cultural practices, and community solidarity. Traditional healing systems, spiritual beliefs, and social networks often provide crucial emotional support in the absence of formal mental health services. The study concludes by advocating for a rights-based, culturally sensitive mental health framework that incorporates environmental justice and community participation. By foregrounding the psychological impacts of environmental change, this research emphasizes that true sustainability must include mental health resilience especially for those who are most affected and least responsible for environmental degradation.

Keywords: Psychological well-being, marginalized communities, environmental change, climate anxiety, eco-trauma, mental health, environmental justice